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ABSTRACT

A study of English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) education in the United States is summarized. Focus is on special challenges in providing ESL education and promising ways in which providers are meeting those challenges. An introductory section describes the context of current ESL instruction, including the nature of the learners' needs and backgrounds and political issues. Several subsequent chapters address specific challenges, describe promising approaches used by some agencies and organizations, and propose additional strategies. The challenges discussed include barriers to student progress through the ESL system, testing and assessment, staffing (teachers and administrators), matching learner goals and curriculum focus, and use of computer technology. Research agendas are identified in each of those areas. The final section proposes a strategic plan for development and provision of ESL services, offering national goals, specific goals in administration, finance, and professional practice, and goals for the ESL field to address. (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

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PROGRAM REALITIES AND PROMISING PRACTICES IN ADULT ESL

THE SOUTHPORT INSTITUTE FOR POLICY ANALYSIS

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A Report on An Investigation of

English as a Second Language Service

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I. THE CONTEXT

For millions of "new Americans," mastering English represents the key that opens the Golden Door. Participating in classes that teach English as a Second Language and literacy allows immigrants and others to gain access to English, to use it and study it. Although fully aware that their chances for steady employment, decent housing, and academic success are shaped by social, economic and political factors, language minority adults, nevertheless, see English as a Second Language (ESL) education as one of the primary means for achieving their own hopes and aspirations and, if that should fail, to help ensure a better future for their children. Those who speak little or no English know that they can survive quite well, relying on their wits, their talents and their ability to cope in difficult circumstances. But they also know that access to better jobs, training programs and higher education requires both literacy and the ability to speak English.

Yet, for millions of potential students, quality ESL services are difficult to find. In many areas, would-be students have to wait 1 to 3 years before they can enter a program, and once they do garner a space, they often find themselves in overcrowded classes (35 to 40 students), taught by teachers with little formal training, and confronted with a curriculum that does not always meet their needs. In addition, ESL students are often denied access to training or academic programs because of placement tests that act as gatekeepers to further educational opportunities, and few have the opportunity to use technology.

These are the program realities that confront ESL teachers and ESL learners. Yet the picture is not as bleak as the larger context suggests. As the examples in this report show, there are sparks of excellence throughout the ESL field. Given political will, strong leadership and adequate funding, the promising approaches outlined here can form the basis for broader innovations.

Teaching English as A Second Language

Teaching immigrants and others the kind of English they need to achieve individual and community goals sounds deceptively simple. Yet teaching ESL is a complex educational undertaking that requires integrating the various dimensions of English and linking them to learner goals. Competence in ESL includes interpersonal, linguistic and cultural dimensions, among them (1) communicating in person and over the phone, (2) understanding various forms of written English, (including prose and document literacy), (3) providing information or expressing ideas in writing, (4) knowing how to access and use the systems and services particular to the U.S., (5) managing to negotiate an English speaking environment with imperfect language skills, and (6) interacting in ways that do not insult anyone unintentionally.

Teaching and learning English have political and economic dimensions as well, since English proficiency alone cannot ensure success for oneself or one's children. In recognition of these realities, some ESL programs address the socio-political aspects of being an immigrant in the United States. Following a model of participatory education, they use curricula that discuss the conditions that shape the lives of language minorities (e.g., immigration status, discrimination, crime and police relations) and provide opportunities for social action that address the issues identified.

In terms of teaching ESL (instead of Adult Basic Education, or ABE, for example), one of the greatest challenges lies in finding ways to balance **fluency** in English (the ability to get one's point across, even in imperfect English) with **accuracy** (the ability to use English that is grammatically correct). To meet that challenge, ESL teachers must know how to provide a stress free environment that allows students to communicate their ideas without fear of making mistakes while at the same time offering opportunities for investigating the grammatical and structural aspects of English. ESL classes must prepare learners for two kinds of challenges: 1) informal interpersonal communication, for situations in which fluency and social appropriateness are more important than grammatical correctness; and 2) formal communication, (memos, reports, essays, formal presentations) for situations where violating the rules of standard English might brand someone uneducated or unschooled.

Participants in ESL Programs

Most of the participants in adult ESL programs are immigrants (95%). The rest are U.S. born adults who have never had the opportunity to learn English. They represent a wide spectrum of learners, encompassing a broad range of educational and socio-economic backgrounds. While a large percentage of participants are language minority adults with fewer than 12 years of schooling in their home countries (42.8% of the foreign born),[1] a significant portion have at least some postsecondary education. While many are poor, others belong to families that are well off financially. Although individual reasons vary, most learners participate in ESL so that they can get a better job, take advantage of training opportunities, help their children in school, communicate with their neighbors, and "defend themselves" against an English speaking system that does not always have their best interest in mind.

Yet not all students have instrumental reasons. Some enjoy English classes because they provide the opportunity to "feel educated", to gain access to intellectual knowledge, share thoughts and express ideas through discussion and through writing. Others come to make friends and increase their circle of acquaintances who will help and support them. Most come to English classes out of a sincere desire to learn English. Yet, increasingly, attendance in ESL classes is required to receive benefits such as legalization, aid to families with dependent children (AFDC), or refugee cash assistance. This creates circumstances in which the motivations of the learners might not match the agendas of the government program that mandates participation.[2]

ESL students bring a wealth of experience and background knowledge to the classroom, regardless of their proficiency in English. They have often managed to survive quite well in circumstances that their teachers can barely imagine, both in the U.S. and in their home countries. Those who are unschooled often possess a certain degree of "strategic competence" that allows them to negotiate their environment without much English. These strengths are evidenced by the fact that most students have managed to secure housing, enroll their children in school, build strong families, access social services, and find jobs. As the experience with amnesty programs has shown, thousands of ESL learners, classified as low-literate, have successfully filled out immigration papers and negotiated their way through the complex legalization process that resulted from passage of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA).

Many of the perceived strengths of immigrant adults results from the support that social networks (family, friends, community groups) provide.[3] As a result, ESL learners who are part of a strong immigrant community tend to fare much better than those who do not share the language and cultural background of their neighbors. When cut off from social support, adults who do not have the English language and literacy skills needed to access services and voice their needs often flounder and may feel like "fish out of water".[4] English classes serve to connect them to the wider community.

The Politics of ESL*

To help language minority adults gain access to English, all levels of government and many private organizations provide English as a Second Language classes. These efforts serve about 1.8 million adults each year at a total cost of approximately $700 million. But they are manifestly inadequate in a great many ways.

Despite the large numbers of people they serve, ESL classes fall short of meeting the demand for service: most do not provide the comprehensive services that people who are seeking to improve their English need and want. Moreover, the quality of most programs leaves much to be desired. The learning gains of most students are modest, and most programs are locked into an instructional design that is poorly attuned to the many different needs of the learners they serve.

Why is it so difficult to provide quality ESL services for the field? The answers lie in the policies and politics that have moved English as a Second Language to the margins of the education and training field. At the federal, state, local, and programmatic levels, adult ESL lacks an institutional and financial base, as well as the

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*A more extensive discussion of the political issues in the service delivery system for adult ESL appears in the companion volume "ESL and the American Dream." That publication includes demographic information, a detailed description of providers and funders, and recommendations for the entire field.

professional and instructional infrastructure that any educational service must have to succeed. In most areas of education and training, ESL is a low status activity that is poorly supported. ESL has become the step child of the Adult Basic Education (ABE) system (through which most adult schools are funded), and the community college system (where much of ESL is located, both in its non-credit and for-credit manifestations). It also takes a back seat in training programs such as the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) and the Jobs Opportunities and Basic Skills Training Program (JOBS), where there is often strong resistance to meeting the employment-related needs of those who still struggle with English. Against this backdrop of neglect, creating quality programs that meet the language and literacy needs of those who speak a language other than English has become a major challenge.

The Challenge for Programs

The shortcomings of the ESL field manifest themselves most strongly on the program level. Here, the fragmentation of the system has impeded learner transitions, and indifference to language testing issues has resulted in assessment and evaluation frameworks that serve neither policy makers, programs, nor funders very well. The marginalization of the field is reflected in a lack of standards for teaching, and the generic ESL curriculum is often unresponsive to learners with special needs. Finally, inadequate resources have prevented programs from receiving the guidance they need so that they can make informed decisions about technology.

Five major problems affect the effectiveness of programs: (1) lack of transition; (2) inappropriate testing and assessment; (3) staffing problems; (4) mismatch between the curricula and learner needs; and (5) limited access to technology. This report examines each of these issues, highlights innovative approaches to finding solutions for these problems, and presents strategies for change. The report concludes with a Strategic Plan for ESL.

This publication and the companion volume "ESL and the American Dream" are the final reports of an investigation of English as a Second Language (ESL) Service for adults in the United States conducted by the Southport Institute for Policy Analysis.

Both reports are based on information and ideas gathered from various sources, including a review of the literature; site visits to Texas, California and Massachusetts, as well as Chicago, New York, and other cities; interviews with policymakers and input from a working group. Although a great many people made extremely valuable contributions to the study, responsibility for the contents of the report rests with the authors alone.

II. MOVING BEYOND ESL:

TRANSITION

Although the adult ESL service system offers many levels of instruction and includes a wide variety of providers, the transition of learners from level to level or from one agency to another is rare. Students from adult schools seldom make successful transitions to community college programs, and students who transfer from non-credit ESL to academic or vocational programs are the exception rather than the rule. A particular concern are immigrant students who enter U.S. schools in their teens, are in danger of dropping out, and have no opportunity to acquire the skills they need to access academic and vocational programs.[5]

It is difficult to determine exactly how many students fail to make successful transitions, because most programs do not keep records that might indicate what programs their students have attended, what their educational goals are or where they go after they leave the program. But informal evidence from the field has been sufficiently alarming that demonstration projects designed to facilitate transition have been funded by several state and federal agencies.[6] It is even more difficult to determine how many adults would like to participate in an ESL class but find the service system confusing and the ESL programs "inaccessible, irrelevant or inappropriate."[7] Groups who have difficulty finding access to any ESL program include women with small children, the elderly, and unschooled students who find that getting information about a program may require the two skills that they do not have--literacy and English.

What keeps ESL students from making successful transitions? Contributing factors include a fragmented delivery system without clear articulation of goals and purposes; lack of responsiveness on the part of mainstream institutions; and curricula that fail to provide a sound basis in literacy. The most significant barriers occur on three levels: at the levels of the individual learner, the programs (both sending and receiving), and the system overall.[8] Unless obstacles at all three levels are overcome and barriers are reduced, students who are capable of advancing will fail to do so. Others may drop out of the ESL system entirely because they cannot negotiate its various gatekeeping points.

Student Barriers

In trying to move through the adult ESL system, second language learners must deal with both intrinsic and extrinsic barriers that make transition difficult. Intrinsic barriers, sometimes called "disposition" or "psychosocial" factors, include low self-esteem and low expectations. Many ESL learners have been convinced that they are not college material, and many have not yet considered what their educational and other

goals might be beyond improving their English. Extrinsic barriers are obstacles such as work demands or family obligations that make a sustained commitment to education difficult, lack of financial resources (for books, transportation and tuition), lack of available child care, locations that exist outside of the immediate neighborhood, and inconvenient schedules that conflict with family responsibilities. Finally, the sheer complexity of many immigrants' lives allows learners to participate in education for only short periods of time, requiring that they "stop out" occasionally to take care of other obligations.

A lack of familiarity with various aspects of the educational system (registration processes, admission or eligibility requirements) and lack of knowledge about support services such as financial aid and academic counseling also keep students out of "next step programs," as receiving programs are often called. Finally, inadequate preparation in the higher order literacy skills needed for higher education acts as an obstacle to successful participation in academic, vocational and job training programs.

Program Barriers

Although failure to make transitions is often ascribed to learner factors, program barriers may be even more powerful in preventing students from moving through the system. These barriers exist at both the sending and the receiving institutions. In both cases, discouraging attitudes and lack of knowledge about educational options prevent transition.

Discouraging Attitudes. In both sending and receiving institutions, officials sometimes state that students do not expect to make transitions, and that those who plan to advance beyond their current levels may have unrealistic goals.[9] Administrators in sending programs often point out that most of their students only want to learn a little more English and have no educational plans beyond ESL. Since students are not expected to advance, no efforts are made to help them move on or investigate why they do not enter mainstream programs. As a result, lack of transition becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

More well-meaning is the tendency of some teachers to hold on to their ESL students longer than necessary, creating a place for them that is so comfortable and secure that it becomes difficult for students to leave the ESL nest.[10] Since teachers and learners become attached to each other, it is not uncommon for teachers to complain about "losing" their students to another program, even in cases where the student might be better served someplace else.

Although there are strong exceptions, many receiving programs, particularly those that do not focus on ESL, are less than eager to see ESL students enroll in their program.[11] It is not unusual to find teachers in academic, vocational, or job training programs who are reluctant to serve ESL students and would like to see them stay in

ESL programs until they are fully proficient. Many of these teachers feel that they should not be required to teach immigrant students who are not fluent in English, because these students may require special attention.[12] More than one instructor has stated, "it is not my job to teach them English." Taken together, these negative attitudes serve to keep ESL students in their place and discourage their advancement through the system.

Lack of Knowledge About Options. A major reason why transition is not taking place is that programs often lack adequate knowledge about the educational options available to their ESL students. As a rule, teachers in general ESL adult education programs know very little about programs outside of their system. Many adult school teachers have never heard of training programs sponsored by the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training Program (JOBS) or the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) and are unfamiliar with the community programs that exist in their city. They are not aware that their local community college might have vocational education certificate programs that offer bilingual support, or that their local job training center may provide child care for parents who sign up for the JOBS program. Neither are they likely to know about the participatory ESL literacy programs offered in some CBOs.

Even those who know that these programs exist are often overwhelmed by the eligibility requirements. As one coordinator explained, "We tell our teachers not to discuss JTPA because it is too difficult to keep the requirements straight."[13] Similarly, part-time teachers in non-credit ESL programs at community colleges often do not know details about the admissions requirements, testing processes, and placement procedures that control access to the courses of study ESL students would like to attend. Most importantly, many ESL teachers are not aware that it is no longer permissible for community colleges to place language minority students in mandatory ESL programs based on test results alone.[14]

Because many students rely on teachers as their main source of information about education, this lack of knowledge seriously hurts their chances of learning about the educational options available to them. Unless they have a network of friends and acquaintances who understand next step programs, it is impossible for students to make informed decisions about their educational future.

Lack of Curriculum Articulation. Even in cases where both ESL students and their teachers are aware of next step programs, transition may be difficult because there is no continuum of services that would allow ESL students to move from one agency to the next. In fact, there is often a large gap between the knowledge, skills and strategies provided by one type of agency and the language proficiency expected at the next-step program.

The results of this lack of articulation are quite disturbing. Students who "graduate" from the highest level of adult schools (and are considered academically prepared by their teachers) may be told they have to start over in a non-academic

college class, and students who finish several semesters of non-credit ESL in a community college are often advised to start over in the lowest level of for-credit ESL, because they lack a foundation in grammar.[15] Not surprisingly, many students see this move as punitive and resent being recycled into college ESL for further language development. In response to this overemphasis on remediation, the explicit goal of many transition programs has become to build the language and literacy skills of students to such an extent that they can bypass at least the non-credit ESL programs at the community college.

Competition For Students. In areas where program funding is linked to the number of students served, transition between providers is impeded because agencies are dependent on the funds that students generate for their programs. In these cases, self-interest on the part of the agency dictates that students should stay with one program as long as possible and should only move on after they have completed the program. For example, students who are enrolled in GED programs may not be told that they could get an Associate or professional degree at a community college without the GED, and agencies receiving JTPA funding may not tell students that they could attend a bilingual vocational program at a local CBO. There also have been cases where teachers from community programs have complained that adult schools are stealing students away. Requirements that teachers maintain a minimum level of average daily attendance (ADA) play a role as well, as classes that fall below that level may be cancelled. As a result, there may be program pressure as well as peer pressure that mitigate against early transfers.

Combined with student barriers, the lack of support for transition from both sending and receiving programs inhibits the advancement of students through the ESL system, and it seriously impedes their movement out of ESL to other educational opportunities.

PROMISING APPROACHES

In an effort to facilitate access and promote advancement from one level to another, state and federal funds have been made available to ESL transition projects in California, Texas, Massachusetts, and Virginia. They illustrate the range of efforts being implemented to reduce barriers at various levels and design structures and practices that link services at various agencies.

The Center for Employment Training (CET), a CBO with sites throughout the U.S. has developed a model that transitions students who entered under the amnesty program to employment training. To facilitate transfer from amnesty ESL to job training, CET offers a full range of services that link ESL and civics with an integrated skills program. Support services include access to financial aid (the program is accredited so that students eligible for Pell Grants can attend training full time), child

care, and bilingual job placement services. The high transition rate between amnesty and skills training is largely due to the comprehensive services being offered and the high job placement rate the project is able to achieve.

The Massachusetts English Literacy Demonstration Project includes partnerships with four CBOs and three community colleges in an effort to bridge services between ESL providers and academic or vocational programs at the college level. The project focuses on implementing curriculum changes within each institution and building strong connections between agencies. To help ensure that transitioning students who are not ready for academic work are not placed in non-academic classes, the project is working with ESL faculty at one of the colleges to include a greater emphasis on academic cognitive skills in their non-credit program. The project has been able to convince the college to accept the results of portfolio assessments for placement instead of the standardized test previously used. The project offers a course on Haitian Reality at Roxbury Community College, a sheltered content course attended almost solely by transition students from the Haitian Multiservice Center, another partner. Those who complete the class can receive either college credit or credit for their external degree (similar to a GED).

A project called **PAVE (Promoting Access to Vocational Education)** at El Camino College in Torrance, California has developed an instructor training model that involves a consortium of 18 sites committed to facilitating access to vocational education for limited English proficient (LEP) students. The project tries to change attitudes in both the vocational program and the ESL program (as a rule, neither ESL faculty nor vocational instructors see the transition issues as part of their responsibility) and has developed promising practices to help students succeed in vocational classes.[16] The project found that cluster VESL, (where students study the skills and strategies common to certain job families, such as allied health), was a much more successful and popular model with students than a pre-vocational ESL course that tried to prepare students for vocational training in general.[17]

The **El Paso Community College District** in Texas has developed a demonstration project that links local agencies (the Private Industry Council; Laubach Literacy; and adult schools) with the college so that access to higher education for Spanish speaking language minority students can be facilitated. The program has developed a transition curriculum that consists of two phases: the first phase focuses on providing access to academic classes (bypassing both non-credit and credit ESL) through a transition curriculum. The second phase emphasizes retention in academic courses through a peer tutoring and instructional support model. In an effort to overcome systems barriers, the college is investigating strategies for increasing referrals from participating non-college partners. These include assurances that students will be told that they can continue their GED studies while they participate in the transition project; paying for (or "buying out") a teacher's time at the local adult school and offering classes at community sites. To

remove barriers on the college side, the project has been able to designate a special financial aid counselor who will work with all transition students.

An adult school in Virginia, the Arlington Education and Employment Program (REEP) has designed a transition project that provides a continuum of services from a local CBO to the adult school to entry in the college. REEP has developed a curriculum framework that more clearly articulates the educational focus of each partner. As a result, the CBO now offers native language literacy and conversational English; REEP provides intensive ESL that includes classes focusing on pre-vocational and pre-academic ESL, and both the employment training and the college partners have instituted special focus transition classes. In an effort to help students overcome the hurdles that the testing requirements at the local colleges represent for students, the REEP curriculum takes a two pronged approach. Students engage both in reading and writing activities that build their cognitive academic skills and they participate in sessions that teach them how to use effective test taking strategies.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

All transition programs interviewed found that a strong curriculum, an effective liaison person who works well with both programs, and strong support and commitment from high level administrators are the key to effecting positive change in both sending and receiving programs. The following strategies can help promote transition across the board.

Create an Atmosphere of High Expectations

To promote high expectations for language minority students, adults from the community of the learners can be asked to visit classes, discuss issues, and show that perfect English is not necessary for success. To counteract the prevailing attitudes of low expectations for language minority students, programs need to establish high achievement standards while implementing "opportunity to learn" standards that allow all students to move on to higher vocational, academic or professional levels. To that end, a pedagogical environment that stresses the use and value of cognitive academic skills, provides access to interesting and challenging ideas, and introduces rich literacy activities even for beginning students needs to be created. Opportunity to learn standards might include curricula that start with students's background knowledge, skills and experiences. Scaffolding activities should be included that move students from personal experience to the kind of social, scientific and political issues that are discussed in academic environments. Tutorials, employment and training counseling, advocacy, and support services should be part of any transition program as well.

Provide Alternative Access to ESL

Community programs need to be created for students who feel overwhelmed by standard mainstream programs, speak little English, and who are not able to attend programs beyond their neighborhoods. Such programs may operate in churches, housing programs, shelters, or community agencies and should be staffed by practitioners who understand the language, culture, and social issues that confront language minorities. To provide greater access for students who have not had the benefit of schooling, such programs can offer native language literacy classes along with English development. Care needs to be taken to link such programs to other educational opportunities so that students do not become isolated and instead begin to see educational goals beyond ESL as attainable.

Link all Programs to One Stop Educational Centers

Potential students, actual students, and teachers all need access to information that lets them become aware of educational options within a community and allows them to choose appropriate programs. Information about legal aid, social services and family counseling should be available, as well. Community-wide centers should be developed that track and disseminate information about programs, available slots, and eligibility requirements. Bilingual counselors should visit neighborhoods and make themselves available to programs and students to answer questions and help meet education and training needs. Immigrant rights groups can take the lead in demanding that individual programs provide such information in a form that is accessible to students. Peer advocates from the community of the learners can be trained to collect, translate and disseminate information.

Match Program Design to Learner Realities

All programs must acknowledge that students are likely to withdraw and re-enter ESL programs as they advance through English and get ready to transition to other providers. Intermediate benchmarks must be set so that students who "stop out" will know what they have learned and what they still need to learn to get closer to the next transition point. These benchmarks can be outlined in individual learning plans that serve as educational passports that students carry as they enter and leave a particular program.

To facilitate collaborations across the board, interagency groups should be set up that promote, create, and manage transition programs that span program types. Projects funded by the JOBS program, the Job Training Partnership Act, the Office of Refugee Resettlement, Adult Education Act or by community college funds should be included.

Fund Collaborations

State and federal agencies should provide incentives for collaborations across service providers who can be considered part of an educational continuum. Partners in such collaborations should receive technical assistance from an evaluation team that specializes in transition issues. Funded projects should also have the opportunity to share information and strategies and should be required to develop a common evaluation framework flexible enough to allow for local variation. Referral mechanisms that track information essential for making transition decisions should be included (learner profiles can be entered as well to help develop a longitudinal research base).

Develop Transition Structures for Late-Entry Youth

Accelerated programs should be developed for "late entry youth," teenage immigrants who come to this country with few years of schooling and little English. We must have programs and practices that allow these students to catch up on the academic curriculum that they have missed, or they will have nowhere to transfer to. Partnerships between high schools and out of school ESL programs must be funded, and all school-to-work transition programs must consider LEP youths as a population with special needs. Strong interventions are necessary so that this young group of immigrants will not join the ranks of the unskilled and unemployed.

Make Transition a Quality Standard

As part of establishing quality indicators, all ABE funded programs should have transition as one of their standards (or explain why the standard does not apply to them). Programs should be asked to show what they do internally to facilitate access, retention, and transition and how they have chosen to work with other programs to ensure that transition is facilitated. Successful transition strategies as well as barriers to transition should be discussed in all evaluation reports. Staff developers, state resource centers, and teacher training institutions must put transition on their agenda and help administrators and staff develop effective strategies for transition.[18]

The guiding principles that make transition a reality cannot be implemented by a single type of programming, nor can transition be achieved by a single agency. Since transitions do not happen naturally, greater collaboration and curriculum articulation must be supported. As the examples of programs developed by demonstration projects illustrate, it is possible to develop collaborative models that facilitate transfer across providers. Yet these examples also serve to document that linking ESL programs through a well articulated, comprehensive and coherent framework requires systematic approaches along with special incentives and technical support.

III. HOW ARE WE DOING?

TESTING AND ASSESSMENT

By all accounts, language testing and learner assessment are highly problematic areas for ESL programs. Teachers and coordinators are dissatisfied with standardized tests and unsure of how to deal with ideas for alternative approaches to assessment and evaluation. They also fear that the recent national emphasis on quality standards will result in systems of evaluation and accountability that will throttle innovation and creativity in strong programs and do little to strengthen weak programs. In contrast, government agencies that fund ESL service often see standardized tests as the only evaluation and accountability measure that can reasonably be enforced.

Testing Requirements for Adult ESL

What are present testing requirements for adult education? Contrary to what many teachers believe, the United States Department of Education does not mandate that all students in ABE or ESL programs must be tested. It merely asks states to submit standardized test data on 20 percent of the population served. Nor does the federal government require that a particular test be used; rather, it leaves it up to the states to decide on the most appropriate tools for standardized testing.[19] Locally, private industry councils (PICs), school districts or state Departments of Education might require that a particular standardized test be used with all participants (CASAS and TABE are the most common).

Some federal discretionary programs, such as the National Workplace Literacy Program, have recognized that standardized tests may not be valid for the contexts in which their projects operate. As a result, the Department of Education does not mandate the use of standardized tests, but merely requires that testing measures be both valid and reliable. To help programs meet these requirements, staff are allowed to design and field test their own assessments. To what extent and for what purposes the assessment data submitted by the field is used by the Department of Education is unclear.

Limitations of Available Tests

There are no standardized tests on the market that can adequately measure the proficiency of the great diversity of adults who need ESL service. This is no surprise given the complexity of language skills and the range of abilities that adult learners demonstrate. Yet funders continue to insist that standardized assessments be used to judge individual learner progress, and many use such tests as measures of program effectiveness, as well. This is true in spite of the fact that the most commonly used standardized tests have severe limitations and no one test can meet all assessment purposes.[20]

Why is there no effective standardized ESL test available to programs and funders? Lack of commitment to serving ESL programs is only one answer. The other lies in the complexity of the assessment task. Language proficiency is multidimensional and there is no agreement in the field as to all the elements that constitute competence in a second language. Yet testing aspects of ESL proficiency is not an impossible undertaking. To really understand whether a second language speaker is proficient in English, we would have to follow learners for a few days or weeks to see how well they can deal with everyday language and literacy tasks. But we would also need to know whether a person can handle communication problems that might arise in the future, such as summarizing a report, giving a presentation at work, writing a letter to the editor, or explaining events to a jury. Short of shadowing people and traveling through time with them, there is really no authentic way to test communicative abilities. Clearly such a route is impractical and secondary measures must be found that give us some indication of how proficient a person is. Such measures might include face to face interviews, simulations that require problem solving through communication, writing samples or responses to something the person has read.

Developing assessments of this kind requires more time and money than most test developers are willing to invest. Yet, if this country is serious about finding out more about the English language and literacy proficiency of its residents and if we truly want to know how much English learners are acquiring through participation in ESL classes, such investments must be made.

STANDARDIZED TESTS. The standardized tests currently used in ESL programs fall into two groups: Adult Basic Education (ABE) tests designed for native speakers of English, and ESL tests, designed for those who speak English as a second language. Although ABE tests were not meant to test the skills of second language learners, they are often used (inappropriately) in that way.

The most popular of the ABE tests include the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), the Adult Basic Learning Examination (ABLE), and the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS).[21] Taken as a whole, standardized ABE tests have one advantage: they allow programs to compare the scores of ESL students to the scores of native speakers of English to see if certain threshold levels have been achieved. But these tests have an even greater disadvantage: they do not indicate to what extent the person who took the test speaks English. In essence, ABE tests miss what employers, teachers, and the students themselves most want to know about non-native speakers of English: How well can the person communicate in English in face-to-face interactions and on the telephone, and to what extent can the person express ideas in writing?

The shortcomings of the standardized ABE tests currently used have been discussed elsewhere and will not be examined here. However, a new test, the Test of **Applied Literacy (TALS)**, designed by the Educational Testing Service, has attracted a great deal of attention recently, because its design, and many of the items it contains, are

closely related to the 1991 National Adult Literacy Survey. Because some state and federal officials might see this relationship as grounds for encouraging or requiring use of the TALS in adult education programs, it deserves special scrutiny.

The Test of Applied Literacy is a reading test, and it assesses reading skills by three scales: "document," "prose," and "quantitative" literacy. It uses a format that asks students to base their answers on their understanding of materials or problems they might encounter in everyday life (such as newspaper stories or tax forms). In this regard, it is a step forward from traditional multiple choice reading tests.

The TALS items are similar to those used in the NALS (see below) and it has many of the same problems when applied to limited English adults. To begin with, it requires a familiarity with American cultural norms and concepts that immigrants, and possibly others, are not likely to have (for example, items refer to "blue chip portfolios," and "household recycling"). In addition, it does not necessarily reflect the kinds of literacy materials that language minority adults commonly use and the ways in which they commonly use them. Finally, the complexity of the language used in the test is above the proficiency levels of many ESL students.[22] Given these limitations, many experts believe that the TALS should not be used to assess the language and literacy abilities of any but the most advanced ESL learners.

ESL TESTS. Although they are more appropriate for use by ESL programs than the ABE tests, the standardized ESL tests that are commonly available have shortcomings, as well. The most popular tests include the following: the Basic English Skills Test (BEST), the Comprehensive English Language Skills Assessment (CELSA), the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and the Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency.

The Basic English Skills Test (BEST) provides a measure of very basic survival skills, listening comprehension, and conversational ability of those who are new to English. Programs report that students are often able to memorize the items and that the test is only appropriate at the lower levels. The BEST was at one time administered in almost all refugee programs, but has proved too limited for general use, although a fair number of programs report using the test for placement of students with low literacy skills. It can help in assessing the initial language and literacy skills of newcomers with little English and little schooling.

The **Comprehensive English Language Skills Assessment (CELSA)**, is an integrated ESL assessment which assesses how well a second language speaker can deal with written English texts representing various levels of difficulty. (It is a modified cloze test that assesses familiarity of English structures in context.) The test appears on the list of standardized assessments approved by the State Department of Education in Illinois and has been accepted as an assessment of an ESL student's "ability to benefit," a requirement for obtaining Pell grants. The CELSA is useful inasmuch as it provides

some indication on the language proficiency levels of ESL students, and it is certainly more appropriate for use in ESL programs than either the TABE, the ABLE, or even the TALS. However, it does not tell programs and funders if students can use English to achieve in a variety of situations. Therefore, it has only limited use as an ESL proficiency assessment.

The **Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)**, is the most comprehensive of the standardized ESL tests on the market. Its scores are used for admission and placement by more than 2,300 colleges in the United States, and over half a million students world wide take the test each year. The TOEFL measures some of the key aspects of English proficiency (such as listening comprehension, vocabulary, English sentence structure, reading comprehension and, as an option, oral proficiency and written expression). Because the level of difficulty of the TOEFL starts where most advanced (non-credit) courses in adult ESL end, the test is simply too difficult for the vast majority of ESL students in adult education programs.

The **Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency** is used as a placement test by many community colleges to determine whether ESL students are ready for academic work. The test assesses grammar, vocabulary and reading comprehension and strongly favors those students who have studied grammar and are familiar with the structures and conventions of formal English.

While all four ESL tests discussed above have the advantage of being standardized language tests (rather than simply reading tests), none is capable of gauging how well second-language speakers can use English in real life situations. And only one, the TOEFL, includes any measure of the ability of students to express their ideas in writing. Since no one test can adequately measure all aspects of proficiency or comprise the full range of skills and strategies that learners possess, policymakers who support standardized tests must work with programs and practitioners to determine which aspects of proficiency count the most in particular contexts and support the development of tests that focus on these aspects.

Testing Purposes

There is more than one reason why programs are not likely to find the test that meets their needs. Different program functions require different types of assessment and no one instrument can serve all purposes.

At the start up of a program and at periodic intervals, ESL programs need information about the community they serve so that they can decide what kind of services are appropriate **(community surveys or needs assessment)**. Once a needs assessment has been completed and a program developed, programs must also decide whether a given curriculum is appropriate for the students who come to their doors **(intake)**. If a program has several levels, intake counselors need to match learners with the appropriate classes

(placement). Once placed in a class, teachers want to know what students already know so that they don't waste their efforts teaching what learners already know **(diagnostic)**. After students have been in the program for awhile, teachers, learners, and funders are looking for some indication that participation has made a difference in students lives **(progress)**. Outside stakeholders are interested in tests as well. Employers and educators in receiving programs want to know whether students have achieved certain threshold levels that would indicate readiness for academic or vocational education, or job training or whether they can perform certain necessary job tasks **(achievement)**. Clearly, no one test can serve all of these purposes, nor can a standardized test provide answers to the question why certain groups of ESL students learn better in some settings than in others. At best, the standardized tests on the market today can serve as aids in placing large groups of students and can help document how much learners have progressed in the kind of proficiency the test measures.[23] If testing is to help in making decisions in any of these areas, programs will need to negotiate appropriate assessments with funders.

Any discussion of testing in ESL must also include the political aspects of testing.[24] Of special concerns to both programs and learners are the gatekeeping purposes that many standardized tests serve. In many cases, the threshold levels required for access to job training, vocational education or academic study are set so high that they exclude many students who might benefit from training. These tests are almost never based on the actual language and literacy needed to succeed in mainstream programs, and serve merely as predictors of potential success. Excluding motivated and talented adults from training and academics on the basis of literacy tests alone allows mainstream teachers to abdicate their responsibility of making education accessible to students from a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Unless the politics of testing are addressed, searching for the perfect achievement test will be counterproductive to the goal of equal access for language minorities.

Alternative Assessment: Portfolios and Authentic Interaction Tasks

An increasing number of programs are turning to alternatives to standardized testing, because they are keenly aware that standardized tests cannot provide a full measure of a learner's language abilities. To capture the changes in language and literacy development that occur as a result (or a byproduct of) participation in an ESL program, a growing number of administrators and teachers are implementing alternative assessment techniques that are program-based. These assessments are designed, at least in part, to explore the relationship between what is taught in a particular program and what students learn. Since alternative assessments of this kind are based on congruency between what is taught and what is assessed, they have a much greater curriculum validity than most standardized tests.[25] In ESL programs, the most common of these alternative assessments are portfolios and authentic interaction tasks.

Portfolio Assessments. Portfolios represent collections of learner performance in those areas that teachers and learners have deemed important.[26] ESL portfolios might include any of the following: (1) audio tapes of conversations with learners or videos of a short presentation the student has given; (2) comments on stories or articles the student has read; (3) writing samples; and/or (4) the final product of a joint project, such as a community survey or a set of language experience stories. In most programs, teacher and learner work together to select and evaluate portfolios and comment on the progress that learners have made. Although portfolios encompass a wide range of performance, most programs have concentrated their efforts on writing portfolios

Authentic Interaction Tasks. ESL programs increasingly are trying to use authentic assessments that evaluate a learner's ability to communicate in specific settings. Learners are given certain tasks while teachers and their peers observe these students and comment on their progress and their performance. At the workplace, these tasks might include taking a phone message, responding to an irate customer who wants information, or designing and discussing a frequency distribution chart. These tasks differ from the competencies measured by traditional "competency-based" tests in at least two important ways: (1) authentic task-based assessments are not pencil and paper tests; rather they require students to interact with other people and to perform the kind of tasks that have meaning in their lives; (2) evaluators and students work together to document successes and identify both strengths and the difficulties students experience (for example, difficulties in understanding what was said or in getting a point across, or using a tone inappropriate for a particular context). The results of task based assessments are often captured in scaled "Can Do" lists that show whether a student can deal with certain tasks "with ease," "okay" or "with difficulty".

Limitations of Alternative Assessments

Although they have great intuitive appeal, alternative assessment measures are difficult to design and even more difficult to evaluate. For ESL programs, the greatest challenge lies in deciding which aspects of language to focus on and what measures to use to evaluate progress and achievement. Setting benchmarks (deciding what level of performance might be expected for learners in particular settings) has proved particularly difficult. Programs face the greatest challenges, however, in trying to achieve greater reliability in assessing student work and aggregating the results of the assessment so that information gathered from large groups can be reported in ways that make sense to people who are not involved in the assessment process. As one program administrator put it, "we are not always certain what information we should record for our own purposes and what data we should report to funding sources."

In order to deal effectively with the dilemmas of testing and assessment, the adult ESL field needs strong leadership. It also needs resources and technical assistance for the development of alternative assessment frameworks that are general enough to allow for program comparisons and flexible enough to take into account local program context.

National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS)

In 1989, the Department of Education commissioned a study designed to assess the English literacy abilities of the U.S. population using a nationwide household survey. The survey, conducted by the Educational Testing Service and its subcontractor, Westat, Inc., assessed the literacy skills of 26,000 adults across the nation. The survey was not designed to assess the abilities of non-native speakers of English, although non-English speakers were included in the sample.

What does the NALS tell us about the language proficiency of those who speak English as a second language? The short answer is "not enough," although more information may be available when the language minority data is analyzed in the spring of 1994. So far, we only know that 25 percent of those who scored in the lowest group of the NALS were foreign born, but we do not know anything about the nature of their difficulty with the test items. In essence, while the available NALS data tell us that, on average, immigrants scored in the lowest two categories and that 11 million immigrants scored in Level 1, they do not tell why immigrants scored low or give us any clues about how to help them through improving adult ESL programs or other means.

In fact, it is doubtful whether results from the NALS can be very useful for ESL planning or evaluation, even after all the data from the survey are available. There are at least three reasons why this is the case.

First, the NALS does not tell us how well non-native speakers of English can deal with the language and literacy challenges they encounter in their daily lives. It only tells us how well they can read the kinds of items contained in the test. In addition, the NALS only assesses reading ability. As a result, data from the survey cannot be used to determine how well language minorities speak English, how well they can write English, or how well they can understand spoken English in various situations. Furthermore, the NALS data does not tell us how well language minority adults can use English to express their opinions and make their voices heard, skills critical for civic participation. In short, the NALS misses many of the most important aspects of English language proficiency. It demonstrates that if we care to know about the language abilities of immigrants, more appropriate surveys need to be designed.

Second, the NALS assumes familiarity with American culture. Many of the items represent situations, such as mortgage payments, parent/teacher evaluations and bank deposit slips that are likely to be unfamiliar to many language minority adults who come from developing countries. Because of the strong class and culture bias of the NALS, new arrivals, in particular, are likely to score much lower than if they were given an assessment that reflects more general concepts.

Third, the NALS only assesses reading abilities in English. It does not tell us whether adults who speak a language other than English can read and write in their mother tongue. Thus, an immigrant with a Ph.D in nuclear physics from Russia who has not yet learned enough English to understand the items on the NALS would be counted among those who are truly non-literate.

In sum, the NALS data released so far cannot and should not be used as a basis for any kind of decision making about adult ESL, and there appear to be severe limits to how useful the results of the NALS can ever be for assessing the abilities of limited English adults. In fairness, the test was not intended to serve the needs of the adult ESL field, and it is not surprising that it does not do so.[27]

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Conduct a Household Survey of Those who Speak English as a Second Language

Given that there are 25.5 million adults in the United States who speak a language other than English, the country needs a national assessment that provides an accurate picture of their true abilities. To that end, a national survey must be developed that examines the English language skills along with native language literacy skills of those who are not yet fully proficient in English.

A household survey can be used to examine the situations in which adults use English at present and the contexts where they might use it in the future. A language inventory of this type will provide information on the English skills that non-native speakers have and the strategies they use to participate in an English speaking environment with less than perfect English. This inventory can be matched against a set of objective language and literacy tasks that reflect the kind of English language demands that respondents encounter now, as well as those they are likely to encounter in the future.

Such an assessment would provide the country with a picture of the English language use, the English language demands, and English language skills that characterize the ESL population of the United States. To round out this language and literacy profile, such an assessment should also document the literacy skills that respondents have in their native language so that policymakers and planners get a fuller picture not only of the literacy problems that this country faces but of its language resources as well.

Fund An ESL Assessment Model

Federal or state agencies should provide funding incentives for ESL programs who want to investigate and document learner progress, using a combination of

standardized tests and alternative assessments. Participating programs would receive funding to set up assessment and curriculum cadres that meet with teams from other projects who have a similar focus and serve a similar population (such as workplace programs in the service industry, or VESL programs that integrate skills training and language learning). Funded projects would be asked to use their teams to develop a common assessment and evaluation framework that is flexible enough to encompass differences in local contexts.

Programs would use part of their funds to set up a common database that includes background information on participating learners along with samples of student work (e.g., writing samples, responses to a short reading, summary of a simple anecdote; a taped interview or a short presentation). Collected work samples will be accompanied by scoring rubrics and benchmarks that have been developed by participating programs. The assessment teams will use these samples to develop a consensus within and across programs on "what counts" in different communication contexts.[28] The teams would also suggest what levels of fluency, accuracy, and creativity learners might be expected to have at various levels of ESL proficiency.

Link Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability

Programs should be required to design an evaluation and assessment framework as part of each funding proposal. Already common in discretionary programs such as federally funded workplace literacy and family literacy programs, such requirements could include provisions for hiring a consultant or an outside evaluator who monitors the evaluation process and provides technical assistance.[29]

Programs that have a similar focus (community college non-credit ESL, for example, or CBOs integrating ESL and skills training) can receive incentives for setting up a common evaluation framework that is linked to a common database. Results of the database can be fed into an expert system that will eventually match learner characteristics with appropriate approaches for teaching second language learners.

PROMISING APPROACHES

The **Massachusetts Department of Education** has implemented a peer evaluation system for programs which has been very successful.[30] Teams of administrators and teachers visit programs, ask questions and discuss program issues with the staff. The teams then develop a report with recommendations for improvement. Department of Education and technical assistance staff attend the exit interview at the project, then work with the staff to strategize responses to the evaluation report. The evaluators receive extensive training by the Department before the teams are sent out. The program has proved valuable both because projects are reviewed by practitioners, and because practitioners get to see a variety of practices to help them review their own projects.

The **National Institute for Literacy** (NIFL) plans to sponsor an Academy on Performance Accountability in December of 1993. The goal of the academy is to bring teams from up to 10 states together to create a comprehensive and uniform "performance measurement, reporting and improvement system" (PMRIS) for literacy and basic skills students. According to the grant announcement for the academy, a PMRIS is "a clearly defined and coordinated process for: 1) measuring literacy outcomes for adult learners who participate in literacy and basic skills programs; 2) reporting this information on a regular basis to service providers, program administrators, elected officials, service consumers, and the public; and 3) using this information to improve program quality and state-level policies that guide these programs." Ultimately, NIFL hopes that the PMRIS can be used nationally. Although there is no major focus on ESL, the Institute hopes that the models developed by the Academy will be appropriate for ESL contexts as well.

The **College of Staten Island**, part of the City University of New York (CUNY) system, no longer requires that students who are not fully proficient in English take ESL classes. Although all students take a general English placement test, those who score low have the option of enrolling either in 1) academic courses that do not require strong writing skills, 2) developmental classes for native speakers of English, or 3) ESL courses. The ESL program offers participating students an intensive block of classes that includes a content course (in history or psychology) taught by an academic instructor, as well as an ESL reading and an ESL writing class that focus on similar subject matter as the content course. This approach has several advantages: the placement test no longer acts as a gatekeeper to academic education; the responsibility for teaching language minority students is shared between mainstream and ESL teachers; and students are allowed to choose the combination of courses that best meets their needs. Those concerned about standards win as well. Since successful completion of freshman composition is required for graduation, the university has not lowered its standards for granting college degrees.

The process of implementing collaborations around assessment and evaluation processes requires political will and a commitment to see such projects succeed. If accountability measures are to be embraced by the field, teachers, learners and program staff need to play an active role in assessment. While such an effort would initially be expensive, the investment will pay off in the long run in terms of cost-effectiveness (less duplication of effort), efficiency of data collection and greater standardization of the field.

IV. A DEGREE OF CARING:

NECESSARY BUT NOT SUFFICIENT

STAFFING ISSUES

The staffing problems in the ESL field hurt all stakeholders. Good teachers are not adequately compensated for their efforts; students may end up with teachers who are not qualified; and administrators cannot expect their part-time teachers to make changes in program structures and curriculum. Across the field, staffing is highly uneven. While some programs have teachers and administrators who are excellent, others are run by staff with little experience or expertise pertinent to adult ESL. Ultimately, a significant part of this problem is due to the large number of part-time teachers employed by many ESL programs and the insecurity of employment, as well as the lack of status that results. To help ESL programs provide the service that learners need, staffing problems must be addressed from two directions: teachers must be provided with access to career ladders, and qualifications must be established for those wishing to move up that ladder. In addition, administrators and teachers must be able to participate in the kinds of professional development activities that allow them to work together to strengthen ESL services.

Staffing Patterns

Although nationwide only about 25 percent of ESL teachers are full-time employees, staffing patterns vary widely. In some areas, only 10 percent of the ESL staff have permanent positions; in rare cases, the split of full-time vs. part-time is closer to 40/60. The number of full-time positions available depends on funding mandates, state and local policy, and agency constraints. It also depends on institutional policies: often administrative structures at community colleges or school districts limit the hiring of full-time staff even when funds become available.[31] Although ESL projects that receive discretionary funds through federal grants are sometimes able to create full-time positions for staff who will be involved in these grants (family literacy and workplace programs are examples), these positions are often lost when the grant period ends.

ESL programs that receive regular ABE and state funds report that the pressure to provide direct services allows only a limited amount of money to be spent on permanent jobs with benefits. Program quality suffers, because part-time teachers cannot be required to participate in curriculum development and program planning without additional compensation. Programs also report that the push to serve as many students as possible has meant that only a limited amount of money is available to upgrade the skills of the poorer teachers and create career ladders for those who are excellent.

The decision to limit full-time employment for teachers has resulted in a vicious cycle. First, because only marginal employment is available, the programs are reluctant to demand that only those who can demonstrate professional training and teaching experience have access to teaching.[32] Then, since no special qualifications to teach ESL are required, no professional opportunities are made available. Unless this deadlock is broken, adult ESL teachers will remain marginalized.

Administrators

What about the administrators in ESL programs? The quality of the administrative staff in the ESL field is also uneven, ranging from directors who are highly qualified to those who are unfamiliar with key ESL issues. Given the instability of programs created by high staff turnover and discontinuous funding, administrators committed to ESL are necessary to build quality programs. Researchers have found that many high quality programs depend on a program director who acts as a guiding light and manages to secure funding, procure resources, motivate staff, coordinate services, and spend "quality time" with students who come to the office.[33] The best of these administrators also involve learners and staff in program decisions and know how to chat up policymakers and funders.

Administrators who fit that profile are the exception, however, rather than the rule. Since most directors have only part-time responsibility for ESL, they are often not aware of the key components that define a good language program. As a result, issues specific to ESL (such as the need for bilingual support staff, the importance of assessing native language literacy, or the necessity to hire teachers who can combine second language development with literacy teaching) are often neglected by administrators whose only experience has been with ABE programs.

Support Staff

Because of the special nature of second language programs, the quality of an ESL program is as much defined by the quality of its support staff as by the quality of its teachers. Most quality ESL programs serving beginning students have bilingual intake staff who can put learners at ease and answer questions in a language that students can understand. (Programs who serve many different language communities often have several aides from the community or ask advanced students to translate for some of the less common languages.) Many bilingual intake workers have been trained in administering a literacy assessment in the native language of the learner and know how to gather background information on educational experience, work history, present life circumstances and future goals. Although many ESL programs do not offer translation assistance, it is difficult to see how ESL programs can do an adequate job of needs assessment, goal setting and literacy testing if students are asked to explain their circumstances in a language that they have not yet mastered.

Staff Qualifications

Many ESL teachers don't have formal credentials attesting that they are qualified to teach ESL to adults, and a large portion have only minimal teaching experience. Yet many of these teachers can be considered professionals.[34] A great number are committed to their work: they attend conferences and workshops and spend time developing curricula, planning alternative assessments, and collecting materials for their classes. This group represents a talent pool that has not been used to full advantage.[35] Since many of these teachers are "self-starters" when it comes to professional development, the challenge for the field lies less in upgrading their skills than in supporting their creativity and providing them with access to career ladders so they will continue to work in ESL and contribute to its success.

Most ESL teachers in adult education live their professional lives at the margin (although a few have been lucky enough to obtain permanent full-time positions). They face unstable employment, receive few benefits, teach in overcrowded classrooms, and do not receive the respect from their academic colleagues that they deserve. Since many work on part time contracts, their jobs are unprotected and the rewards they reap are largely intrinsic.[36] What's more, most ESL teachers get paid by "contact" hours, which means their salaries are based on the hours they spend in the classroom teaching, not on the amount of time they spend on preparation, student counseling, or staff development. In the end, teachers who do no preparation, spend no extra time with students, and only teach the book, make significantly more money per hour than those who spend extra time developing activities that challenge their students. As a result of these working conditions, teacher turnover is high and many of the best teachers leave the classroom.

Although some ESL teachers represent the best and the brightest adult education has to offer, the field also includes teachers who are well meaning but lack the skills necessary to teach challenging classes to language minority adults. While some of these practitioners are volunteers in tutoring programs or work in churches or other community programs, many others are teachers in adult schools who have teaching credentials; and still others have master's degrees in applied linguistics and teach in community colleges. Most troubling for many is the fact that in beginning classes, where two-thirds of the students are enrolled, there is a significant mismatch between the cultural, social and economic background of the teachers (most of whom are middle-class women) and those of the learners.

No matter who they are or where they teach, too little effort is made to evaluate teachers and upgrade the skills of those ESL teachers who are less than adequate, partly because programs cannot require part-time teachers to attend uncompensated staff development sessions. But even if part-time teachers were to attend training sessions (and many have expressed a desire to do so), adult ESL programs do not have the resources required to turn an inexperienced teacher into a professional ESL educator, either through mentoring or staff development.[37] The most they can offer are a few

stipends so that teachers can attend local conferences or participate in regional workshops. Since most of the content in these sessions is focused on the immediate needs of teachers, those who attend simply receive a grab bag of skills and techniques that make their classes more lively. Seldom do ESL teachers receive the opportunity to develop and hone their skills through participation in ongoing staff development that targets the particular teaching problems that they face.[38] As a result, there is little opportunity for training for those who need it the most. In the end, everyone is short changed: the individual teachers who feel at a loss, the program that has to deal with uneven competence among its staff, and most importantly, the learners who know that whether they will have one of the better teachers will depend largely on the luck of the draw.

What should be qualifications for teaching adult ESL? Many adult educators consider the following essential.

1. **Knowledge about the ways in which adults develop literacy in their native language and acquire proficiency in a second language.** Such knowledge should extend to both formal and informal ways of acquiring language and literacy and should include an awareness of the teaching processes that support the literacy development and language acquisition of different groups of learners. Teachers should also understand the relationship between first and second language literacy acquisition and know about effective ways of linking the personal and expressive dimensions of literacy with its cognitive/academic aspects.

2. **Knowledge of and practice in approaches for teaching language minority adults in ways that are educationally sound, developmentally appropriate, and socially responsible.** Such approaches should include strategies for linking what is to be taught to the background knowledge and experiences of the learners and for making difficult materials accessible to students without much formal schooling. It should also include effective ways of promoting fluency in English while providing opportunities to focus on the forms and structures that make up standard English. An awareness of and sensitivity to culture and class are essential, as well.

3. **Knowledge of and practice in assessing what second language learners already know and what they need to know to become independent learners and meet their goals.** Such knowledge should include strategies for examining the role that English and literacy play in the learners present lives and investigating the English demands that may confront learners when they leave the program. Such knowledge should also include appropriate ways of linking learner assessment with teaching inputs so that teachers and learners become aware of the kinds of approaches that are likely to be successful with certain groups of students.

4. **Knowledge of and practice in planning and implementing self-contained teaching units that take into account that most adult ESL learners only participate for a short while in ESL programs.** Such knowledge should include deciding on "what counts" in a particular class and providing appropriate learning opportunities. It should also include establishing benchmarks, developed jointly by teachers and students, so that participants can see the progress that they are making toward their goals.

5. **Knowledge of and practice in the structures and processes that define a particular teaching context.** Workplace teachers, for example, should have a clear sense of the working environment in which students operate, the language and literacy goals that workers have and the language demands of the worksite. Similarly, teachers who expect to prepare students for employment and training must know something about the employment and training opportunities open to learners in these programs and the levels of language and literacy expected by each. Teachers in pre-academic and pre-vocational classes should be familiar with content-based ESL teaching and those who hope to teach in family literacy programs must understand the language and literacy practices of different cultural and ethnic groups.

Ways in which such knowledge should be derived can include both formal training (university degrees) or professional development (through institutes, tele-courses, and workshops that offer a comprehensive program that links these parts in a comprehensive fashion). Practice in these areas should be developed through hands-on teaching in classroom settings, including internships and small group instruction in various ESL programs.

The Credentialing Dilemma

The problems of upgrading teacher skills has led to a vigorous debate in the adult ESL field around the issue of necessary teacher qualifications. At present, the field is split over the credentialing issue, and two major positions have emerged. One group maintains that adult ESL teachers will not be treated like professionals unless the field establishes strong prerequisites for teaching in the form of certificates, degrees, and other academic credentials. The other holds that academic degrees do not guarantee that an instructor can successfully teach second language learners. In fact the opposite may be true, since such degrees may keep teachers from exploring better ways of supporting non-traditional learners in their efforts to acquire both literacy and proficiency in English.[39] Reports from the field indicate that many community programs are reluctant to hire teachers with MA degrees in Applied Linguistics to work with beginning students because both the personal and professional experiences of these teachers is often too far removed from that of the learners.

There are also concerns that inflexible credentialing requirements will exclude talented teachers who come from the community of the learners. Many educators argue that denying access to practitioners without degrees who themselves are language minority adults could deprive non-traditional students of the role models that might help them succeed.[40]

To attract teachers who can act as role models for non-traditional learners, the ESL community needs to institute more aggressive hiring strategies in immigrant communities. To make teaching in adult ESL attractive to community teachers, career paths must be provided, so that we can begin to close the gap between the cultural, social and economic backgrounds of teachers and the life experiences of language minority students. To that end, staff who start as bilingual intake counselors or facilitators, or aides in ESL programs must be offered support so that they can upgrade their professional skills and move into the teaching mainstream.[41]

At present, there is no consensus in the ESL field on qualifications, credentials or certificates necessary for ESL.

Linking Necessary Qualification to Career Opportunities

To break the present impasse over certification, the ABE/ESL field must find ways to address teacher qualifications and employment issues simultaneously. The model, outlined below, is meant to serve as a starting point for discussion:

An ESL Career Ladder

- Each ESL program should include at least one full-time administrative position in which the manager has direct responsibility for managing the ESL program.[42] Full-time administrative positions should require strong academic credentials in administration along with background in ESL and demonstrated experience in managing or coordinating adult education programs.

- ESL programs should offer full time teaching positions for at least 60% of their staff. Qualifications for full time positions should require both knowledge of second language acquisition and experience in teaching ESL to language minority adults (not just international students). Full-time permanent positions should include some responsibility for coordinating curriculum and assessment projects and acting as mentors to part time teachers. Stipends and scholarships should be made available for practitioners from the community of the learners who wish to attain such credentials.

- Each program should also make some multi-year contract positions available to provide some sense of stability for teachers. Contract positions, which may be either full-time or part-time, should be available to teachers who have knowledge of and experience in the key dimensions of ESL, along with a background in the particular aspects of ESL for which they are hired. Contract teachers can be required to work in teams that help develop curriculum and assessment frameworks and attend staff development sessions focused on their own particular needs. Time spent on program and staff development must be compensated.

- Programs can round out their staff with part-time positions for practitioners who may have no academic credentials and little experience with formal teaching. However, these practitioners should demonstrate exceptional talent or expertise in those areas of ESL deemed particularly important to the program, such as teaching native language literacy, ESL for community participation, or family literacy. Practitioners without much teaching experience can be required to team teach or work with a mentor teacher.

PROMISING APPROACHES

In **Massachusetts**, the Department of Education has completely reformed the funding process to promote quality services to adults. With teacher input, Department staff have developed a series of guidelines on teacher/student ratios, teacher salaries, staff and program development, academic counseling and advocacy. The state then instituted multiyear grants, so that programs would be able to develop and implement long-term plans to meet the guidelines. Programs choose whether to meet the goals in the guidelines, but if they do not, their grants are reduced. Using the program budgets as the means to accomplish these goals, Massachusetts hopes to increase the quality of its programs in both ABE and ESL.

Changing staff conditions was a primary concern of the teacher teams that met with the Department of Education. The first step was to try and raise teachers salaries to $25,000 or $18/contact hour, and including some paid preparation time so that a qualified teaching corps could be maintained. The Department of Education is strongly encouraging this salary rate, in the hope that programs will place an emphasis on recruiting and training full-time teachers. To further professionalize teaching jobs, the same guidelines that created the pay baseline also define the job of a teacher. The new guidelines state that when teachers perform other jobs such as intake, assessment, and counseling, they must receive additional pay. If programs pay their teachers less than this base, their overall grant is reduced. In this way, teachers get the salaries they deserve because programs cannot use the money for other purposes.

Recognizing that another requirement for a quality program is adequate time for program and staff development, the guidelines state that all staff (full- or part-time) must spend 2.5% of their time in staff development, and 3.5% of their time in program development. Again, programs that do not meet these levels have their grants reduced.

The Department is willing to accept the fact that in following these guidelines, programs will be able to serve fewer students, at least initially. But promoting quality over quantity has been a conscious choice, supported by the majority of programs.

In order to guarantee that teachers know how to teach the mandated competency based curriculum and that students are taught by qualified teachers, California is one of the few states that has recommended minimum qualifications for hiring ESL instructors for non-credit programs at community colleges. The requirements begin with a basic background in teaching English as a Second Language, based on either teaching experience or an academic credential. To provide immediate access to teaching, teachers can qualify if the TESL credential is in progress, or if it will be completed within two years.[43] In addition to the state requirements, the San Diego Community College district requires potential adult ESL teachers to 1) complete 3 sessions at the California ESL Teacher Institute Training Program, to gain an understanding of the methodology required to teach the competency based model; 2) observe ESL classes at a continuing education center; and 3) give a 25 minute demonstration lesson in a beginning level class at one of the continuing education centers under the direction of the ESL Department chair of that center.[44] The California Commission on Teacher Credentialing is considering the issue of ESL qualifications as well, but so far there is no agreement between the state Department of Education, which fears that there will not be enough qualified teachers if ESL requirements are instituted and the Commission who supports the need for ESL credentials.

WHAT CAN BE DONE

The fact that most ESL teachers are part-time employees without benefits is both a form of economic exploitation and a short-sighted neglect of the human capital that makes programs run. Part-time employment frustrates efforts to upgrade the quality of the teaching staff. It also frustrates efforts to improve programs in other ways, because teachers do not have enough involvement in any particular program to contribute to making it better or master new teaching practices.

Benefit Pools

Many administrators realize, however, that no matter how many students are served, not all teachers can be full-time. Yet these teachers need the benefits that add security to any job and help to professionalize the field. As a result, some states are discussing the idea of "benefit pools." The idea is based on the realization that, in fact,

many teachers have put together full-time positions by filling part-time posts at a number of sites. Rather than penalize one project by having it carry the full weight of benefits for that teacher, or penalize the teacher by leaving her without benefits, benefit pools allow teachers to receive benefits based on the total number of hours they have worked. In addition, states should make it possible for part-time teachers to participate in group plans for healthcare and other benefits on a voluntary basis, and states and/or local programs should make at least some contribution to these plans. States are often able to buy benefit packages at discount rates, and they should pass along this advantage to their part-time employees.

This idea is not a new one but it is an extremely important one for part-time teachers in ESL. By establishing a system of benefits that is not contingent on holding one of the rare full-time positions, teachers can decide where and when they want to teach. Programs are held accountable for the real costs of their teaching staff, whether they are part- or full-time.

Quality Teaching Standards

The standards movement in adult basic education, initiated by the National Literacy Act, provides a unique opportunities for the practitioners in ABE funded classes to address the professionalism issue. The call for quality standards gives administrators and teachers the chance to self-regulate their profession by codifying the professional backgrounds and practical teaching experiences that ESL teachers must possess to teach **ESL in general**, as well as the knowledge, skills and strategies necessary to teach in **particular contexts** (workplace, pre-academic, pre-employment, or community oriented programs).

As adult education standards are being defined by each state, the ESL field has a unique opportunity: to define quality standards in teaching ESL and to demand better employment opportunities. The call for full-time positions can be strengthened if ESL teachers support the idea that full-time and contract staff should be involved in the continuous improvement of program structures, processes, and outcomes and that staff training must be developed to support these efforts.

V. SPECIAL FOCUS ESL

MATCHING LEARNER GOALS AND CURRICULUM FOCUS

The linear model of ESL, based on a "one size fits all" approach, does not meet the needs of all students equally well. Although life skills and ESL enrichment programs provide students with a sound foundation in language and literacy learning, the generic curriculum often disappoints those who need more focused language services. In particular, the generic ESL curriculum fails to deliver for literacy students, students who work and those who want access to job training. To meet their needs, curricula must be reorganized so that a more focused response can be developed.

Making Room for Literacy Students

In spite of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, the standard ESL curriculum assumes that most of the students who come to ESL classes know how to read and write in their mother tongue. As a result, literacy students who have only a few years of schooling and have not had the opportunity to develop even basic literacy skills are often ignored by the system. Because many programs use pencil and paper tests to place students, literacy students may end up in beginning classes even though they may have acquired some conversational English on their own. These students are then doubly penalized: the oral English that is taught in class is well below their level, while the writing component of the class is far too challenging.[45] In the end, literacy students who are highly motivated, have good coping skills, and could contribute their experience to a class either languish while the rest of the class advances or quit when further attendance seems pointless.

The failure of the system to serve these literacy students is particularly tragic, because adult ESL classes constitute the first chance at formal education for many of them. Some are lucky and find another chance in a class that can meet their needs, perhaps in a native language literacy class or in small group sessions designed specifically for non-readers. The rest are effectively excluded from both education and training until their oral English becomes good enough that they can attend a literacy class with native speakers.

Responding to the Needs of Working Students

Although most ESL students either work or are preparing for work, their needs are only rarely met in ESL programs. In most areas, neither the life skills curriculum offered in beginning classes, nor the ESL enrichment curriculum offered at mid-levels is designed to address the literacy and communication demands that working students face.[46] At best, the usual ESL curricula offer one or two units on employment, but

these tend to focus on employment preparation skills, such as looking for a job through the want ads, filling out an employment application, or participating in an interview, skills not immediately useful for students who have jobs. Only rarely do these curricula encourage teachers to examine the actual contexts in which students have to, or want to, use English at work. As a result, students are not likely to learn the survival skills that matter most to immigrant workers, such as knowing what to say when coming to work on time is impossible, defending themselves against unfair criticism or racist remarks, complaining when their pay doesn't match their hours worked, or making friends with their co-workers.

Ideally these students would be served at the worksite, but this option is not available to most. In the end, while most ESL classes provide learners with the opportunity to increase their general language skills (a worthwhile goal), they fail to provide students with the skills they need to negotiate the communication demands of daily life at work.

Preparing Students for Skills Training

ESL students who are enrolled in programs that promise skills training (such as JTPA, JOBS and refugee programs) are often referred to general ESL classes before they are admitted to training classes. Although some of these ESL classes include pre-employment as part of their curricula, the content tends to focus largely on general job-related skills, rather than on the pre-academic/pre-vocational skills needed for occupational training. While these types of classes may help learners increase their general knowledge about the job market and result in some increases in basic skills, they seldom move students closer to their real goal: English that facilitates successful participation in specific areas of skills training. Although there are a number of models that successfully integrate language and skills training, most ESL students do not have access to them.[47]

PROMISING APPROACHES

The failure of the generic ESL curriculum to take into account the needs of literacy students, working students and those who look for job training are part of the larger problem in which many non-credit programs offer a standard ESL curriculum that fails to consider the communication and literacy demands that particular groups of learners face. While it is neither feasible nor desirable to develop individualized curricula for each learner, it is possible to investigate more closely what the needs of particular groups might be and how these needs can be better met. The following strategies have been tried by various programs in the field.

Identifying Goals and Needs of All Students

In order to provide more focused classes, some programs make a concerted effort to find out more about the contexts in which learners use English in their daily lives and how well they cope in these contexts. This is done through assessment and goal setting activities as new students enter the program (those who speak little English are sometimes provided with bilingual support) and through ongoing language and literacy inventories that allow teachers to find out more about what students already know and what they will need to know in the immediate future. At intake, learners may be asked to fill out a form in their native language, respond to a survey or write a short biographical sketch to help the program informally assess literacy skills.

To focus their ESL curriculum, a number of programs serving ESL students ask learners to take a greater role in exploring their goals, defining their needs and assessing their language and literacy proficiencies. Some invite learners to take part in small group sessions before placement; others integrate goal setting and interest inventories into their regular curriculum. State Departments of Education also are beginning to suggest that special needs be taken into account.

- **The Center for Employment Training (CET) in San Jose** offers learners opportunities to set goals and experiment with various job tasks before they select a training class. Students assess their own interests and strengths and place themselves into the appropriate skills training. If there is a serious mismatch between the language abilities of a student, the literacy demands of the training or the communication skills required on the job, staff and learners work together to select a training area that provides a better match. Since the training uses a multi-level approach that integrates ESL, literacy and skills, CET does not find it necessary to establish threshold levels (e.g., test scores or grade level completion) for entry into training. All those who are eligible to be served are accepted, regardless of proficiency level.

- **At the literacy program at El Paso Community College**, ESL students are involved in various assessment activities for two to three weeks, while a team of facilitators observes and provides input on their goals. After the assessment class, the facilitator team suggests the most appropriate course of action for students, which includes participation in either a Spanish literacy class, an English literacy or a bilingual class. More proficient students are encouraged to attend an advancement course designed to prepare students for academic work and facilitate access to vocational education at the college.

- **The Arlington Education and Employment Program** tries to be responsive to learners' interests and goals on two levels: In the beginning level classes, learners decide as a group which themes or units they want to study as part of their life skills curriculum (crime and dealing with the police are becoming

increasingly popular). At the intermediate levels, learners may place themselves into one of three tracks: a general ESL enrichment course, a pre-academic course, and a pre-vocational course. The latter are designed to help students transition to college and to employment training.

- The **California ESL Model Standards** suggest that programs offer both general and vocational topics as part of their ESL curriculum from the beginning levels on (which topic is chosen should depend on learner goals and interests). Academic topics are suggested from intermediate levels on. The standards also suggest content and teaching strategies for a literacy level for students without much prior schooling.

Using Working Students as Experts

Some general ESL programs make special efforts to meet the needs of students who work by involving learners in developing curriculum units that reflect workplace communication. To that end, students act as resident experts on work and become involved in activities such as designing socio-grams that illustrate who they talk to at work and what they talk about, as well as who they don't talk to and why and what they would like to say if they did.

For example, Donna Price Machado, winner of the 1993 TESOL/Newbury House Award for Excellence in Teaching, found a mismatch between what her textbooks taught and what her students did on the job. To correct this, she visited different worksites and took examples of work-based literacy activities to integrate into her curriculum. One of the workplace examples is a foreman's logbook, kept by one of her former students, which details daily activities of employees. The book has a variety of uses in the classroom: it details different work activities; it has a number of examples where incorrect usage gets in the way of meaning; and it is a real world example of the type of literacy expected by employers.[48]

Providing Access to Skills Training

Funders and programs are starting to realize that students who are not fluent in English should not be denied access to skills training, especially if they face severe pressures to find jobs. Various models have been developed that combine language and skills training. These include 1) **concurrent** models in which learners participate in a skills training class as part of their day and in ESL classes that support such training in another or 2) **sequential** models in which learners attend an ESL class that focuses on the knowledge, skills, and strategies needed for a specific job or a particular family of jobs before attending the training itself or 3) **integrated** models that combine skills training and language training in one course.[49] A variation of this model can be found in bilingual vocational classes, where students receive native language support in learning job skills while they acquire the English language and literacy skills needed for job related talk.

- **Bunker Hill Community College** in Boston, MA, has been promoting access to vocational education for language minority adults for many years. Rather than waiting till the students have mastered all 5 levels of ESL, adults who are still limited English proficient are now able to enter vocational programs with only 3 semesters of ESL since occupational specific ESL is offered concurrent to training. The electronics and allied health programs designed for these students have completion rates of over 90% compared to 50% for the regular mainstream courses. In addition, 50% of last years electronics students continued their higher education.

- **Chinatown Resources Development Center (CRDC)**, a community based organization in San Francisco, CA, runs various training programs including clerical, accounting, financial services, and medical office. CRDC offers short-term training classes that prepare refugees, JOBS participants and others for the workplace. A special focus on cross-cultural orientation allows participants to explore and compare their perceptions and expectations with those of employers. The training includes an internship component that allows participants to go into the workplace informed and aware of the multicultural environment they will face. Unlike many mainstream programs, CRDC does not tell students how they should act in the workplace. Rather, the program describes expectations and norms of the U.S. workplace and encourages participants to interact in ways that are comfortable for them. CRDC is aware that ongoing mobility requires sound basic skills and tries to encourage students to continue their education after they have found a job. Despite the recession in the area, their JTPA program had a 93% placement rate last year, more than 20% higher than average placement rate for JTPA programs in the area.

WHAT CAN BE DONE

To achieve greater congruency between learner goals and program design, ESL programs need to involve learners to a much greater extent in program decisions. While it is not possible to address the particular needs of each individual, ongoing discussions with the learners can help identify curriculum options that are more responsive to the language and literacy needs of particular groups.

Examples of Student Involvement

- Some CBOs have advisory boards made up largely of members of the community of the learners. At one program, El Barrio Popular Education Program in New York, learners sit on the board and participate in making decisions about program changes, curriculum design, and teacher hirings. Community colleges also seek input from community members on their board on educational issues, but very few discuss language issues related to access, quality of ESL or transition.

- Federally funded workplace literacy programs are required to have steering committees or advisory boards that include worker participation. Several of the ESL workplace programs have held focus groups with workers to identify the specific language and literacy skills that they need on the job, the communication patterns that operate at their workplace, and the long term educational goals they want to establish for themselves.

- At times, adult school programs conduct learner surveys to gauge needs, identify goals, and measure levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the program. Students meet in discussion groups (with bilingual facilitators), and in some cases more advanced students interview newcomers in their own language to aid in needs assessment.

- In the past, refugee programs have often used bilingual/bicultural counselors who act as liaisons between newcomers and the ESL program. Having access to someone who speaks their language and who can facilitate cross-cultural understanding helps learners to adjust to ESL classes. Bilingual approaches are used in other contexts, as well.[50] Some amnesty classes have developed models for teaching ESL and civics that allow participants to discuss issues of civics and history in Spanish while they were learning basic English.

In order to serve different groups of students equally well, the field needs guidance on how to set up community wide studies that examine the contexts for which second language speakers need English along with descriptions of the kind of English that is needed for particular purposes. On the program level, we need to examine who the learners in ESL programs really are and what their purposes are for learning English. Finally, the learners themselves must be given the opportunity to help adapt program design and curriculum content so that ESL services can be more effective in teaching the kind of English that will make a difference in learners' lives.

VI. THE PROMISE OF COMPUTER BASED TECHNOLOGY

The power of instructional technology to support certain aspects of adult education has long been recognized.[51] Yet, in spite of initial enthusiasm on the part of language teachers and significant investments in hardware and software, the potential of technology in adult ESL has yet to be achieved and teachers have not yet taken advantage of the technologies that do exist. Three major problems face adult ESL programs that wish to gain more benefits from computer based technology: inadequate resources to purchase and maintain quality equipment, train teachers, and review materials; lack of expertise on the part of program staff that would allow them to make informed decisions about technology purchases; and lack of leadership at the state and national levels in guiding the appropriate and effective use of technology in adult ESL programs. If adult education is to provide ESL learners with access to technology (and they must), these problems need to be addressed.[52]

The Need to Focus Technology Assistance

The diversity of ESL programs and the complexity of available technologies make it necessary to focus technology support in areas that matter most to programs. In particular, programs need guidance on effective ways of using technology to facilitate program management, make sound decisions about purchasing and maintaining equipment, and train ESL teachers in making better use of the technology resources the program has already purchased.

On the administrative level, guidance is needed on how to set up databases that facilitate program management, accountability and planning. An ESL database, for example, can track the proficiency levels and progress of students, report on pertinent background factors and document short and long term goals. While a great many ESL programs are setting up their own databases, most have a great deal of difficulty on deciding what categories pertaining to ESL and native language literacy should be included and which factors are interconnected. While statewide efforts to develop a common database for all adult education programs are being considered,[53] local programs could benefit from being involved in partnerships with other ESL programs that have a similar focus. Whatever costs are involved in providing expert technical assistance to these programs might well be offset by the savings in time, money and resources that individual programs now spend on efforts to construct individual databases that are only partially successful.

ESL programs also need advice on working with computer consultants. Because the scope of work for programming keeps expanding, project funds often run out before the computer program is completed. State Literacy Resource Centers and other

information networks should provide a service that makes recommendations on hiring programmers and on what a program might reasonably expect from such an expert.

Helping Programs Avoid Costly Mistakes

ESL programs also need help in choosing the kind of hardware that is compatible with the ESL software they would like to employ since interface problems constitute a major barrier to effective use of technology. In addition, programs need guidance in selecting a staff person who can keep up with the mechanical and electronic aspects of the new technology and is willing to train others, including interested ESL students.

Again, State Literacy Resource Centers, the National Institute for Literacy and National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education could provide advice on these matters. They could also give assistance in helping programs decide which of the available software and video materials on the market best match the learners they serve and the type of instruction each emphasizes. While there are a fair number of general surveys of instructional technology on the market, and reviews of software are available in technology newsletters, the information contained in these reports is not easily used for decision making by those who are new to technology. Most ESL programs need expert guidance on specific ESL related topics and would welcome straightforward advice on how to proceed.

Conducting Feasibility Studies

Given the complexity of new technologies (CD-ROM; Multi-media Centers) and the lack of technological sophistication of most users, funders should consider feasibility studies that allow ESL programs to explore their technology needs in key areas, such as: (1) program management, (2) data collection, assessment and research in the key aspects of ESL, (3) staff development through telecommunication (4) access to technology for language minority adults and (5) second language acquisition and development of native language literacy. Feasibility studies of this sort, undertaken by actual programs, will help the field determine what kind of technology investment is most appropriate given the mission and the constraints of particular programs. A community-wide feasibility study should culminate in a strategic plan that outlines which ESL programs should take the lead in developing practices and structures that link ESL services with available technology.

Inadequate resources, lack of experience and expertise, and lack of access to technical assistance threaten to isolate programs from advances in technology and prevent ESL learners from having access to the kind of technologies that are already part of many homes and workplaces. To prevent this, the field must find ways to assist practitioners and programs in the use of technology, so that the ESL field can effectively harness its power.[54]

VII. Conclusion

Research Agendas

Research and evaluation studies can help illuminate the principles that lie at the basis of local innovation and help the field generalize beyond particular contexts. Research results can then form the basis for new program models, curriculum frameworks and evaluation plans that become part of priority funding by the states and the federal government.

Transition. The ESL field needs studies that highlight the conditions that promote or impede access, participation, and transitions for particular groups of learners. The result of such studies can be models that facilitate advancement to particular programs, such as training or academics, as well as curriculum frameworks that are flexible enough to work in different contexts. Research investigating transition points between non-credit and credit programs in the community colleges are particularly needed.

Testing, assessment, and evaluation. Besides a national language proficiency survey, the field needs applied research that shows who learns what in what kind of program. Such research can compare native language literacy models with English literacy, teacher focused content-based instruction with open-ended participatory approaches; or general pre-employment models with those that integrate language and skills training. The byproduct of such research will be evaluation models capable of measuring whether the skills that the program emphasizes have been acquired by the learners and to what extent general English language proficiency has increased through participation in a particular program.

Teaching Standards. The ESL field needs to know what approaches successful ESL teachers in the field are using compared to the instructional methods used by poorer teachers. Studies should investigate the relative experience, background, disposition and training of such teachers and determine their influence on teaching competence. Such studies can highlight the usefulness and appropriateness of university-based training and shed light on the talents and skills of teachers who have come to their craft through unconventional means.

Learner Needs and Goals. To help ensure that program design and curriculum are responsive to ESL learners, the field needs a study of the expectations and motivations that bring learners to ESL classes. This would allow us to see who participates in ESL programs for what purposes and to what degree learner expectations are being met. Profiles of ESL learners who persist can be compared to those who leave the program, and those who have chosen to learn English on their own. A byproduct of such a study can be models that allow local programs to investigate the match and

mismatch between their local learner population and their curriculum.

Access to Technology. To increase access to technology for students, the field needs a study that explores the effectiveness of different kinds of computer and video based materials from the learners' perspective. Such a study should investigate why particular groups of ESL students learn better through some materials than others and make recommendations on the most effective use of particular technologies for specific purposes.

Adult ESL suffers in part because there is no reliable data upon which policymakers, funders, administrators and teachers can base their decisions. If programs and funders are to be given information on what works for what kind of students and under which circumstances, research in ESL must be made a priority. Continuing the present practice of examining ESL only as part of a broader ABE agenda obscures both the problems of the field and the impacts that ESL education has had.

Summary

The challenges that ESL programs face are shaped by the larger realities of language and literacy education: a field that exists at the margins of adult education, a fragmented service delivery system, an undifferentiated curriculum, and a lack of guidance and assistance. Yet, as examples of promising approaches illustrate, there are instances when progressive policymakers, programs and teachers have been able to make a difference, changing local conditions and providing inspiration to the field.

Unfortunately, most of the promising innovations are limited to a small number of programs. Often they have been supported by short-term demonstration grants. While the benefits of these innovations may persist in the programs that developed them, they are too seldom disseminated to the ESL field as a whole. As a result, there are sparks of excellence in addressing the problems of adult ESL programs, but they are seldom fanned into prairie fires. On the contrary, as some educators like to point out the field quite frequently follows the motto "If there is a spark of excellence, come, let us water it."

For every problem mentioned in this report, some program somewhere has the solution, or at least part of it. But looking across the ESL field as a whole, problems of transition, testing, teaching standards, curriculum focus and technology still seriously impair the effectiveness of the vast majority of programs. This is tragic, because each problem, and each of its ramifications, has direct consequences for the ability of the nation's adult ESL system to meet the needs of limited English adults.

Not only must these problems be solved, but they must be solved for the adult ESL system as a whole. Only then can the 12-14 million limited English adults receive the service that they, and the nation, need and deserve.

VIII. A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR ESL

No significant progress in improving the quantity and quality of ESL service for adults in America can occur without the combined efforts of all of the stakeholders in the ESL system: the federal government, states and localities, private funders and, last but not least, professionals within the ESL field itself.

The federal government must play a larger and more effective role in the ESL field. This must be the first priority in any strategic plan for ESL. But it cannot be the only priority. Concurrent with the development of a new federal role must be the development of new roles for other levels of government, private organizations and the ESL field itself. In fact, federal activism is likely to occur only if these other stakeholders in ESL demand it, and only if they are prepared to shoulder their share of responsibility for creating a better service system.

NATIONAL GOALS

The overall goal of all these partners in the ESL enterprise, and of any strategy to address the national problem of providing adequate service, must be to ensure that the nation provides a supply of high quality ESL instruction that at least meets the demand for present service offerings and that expands certain high priority areas of service as soon as possible.

SPECIFIC GOALS

To achieve this overall goal, all the partners in the ESL service system must join forces to achieve five more specific goals.

1. **To separate the administration and financing of adult ESL from other educational and social services.** Many, if not most, of the problems of ESL service arise from the fact that it is hopelessly intertwined with numerous other service systems. This renders it almost invisible to policymakers, administrators and the public and leads to neglect of needs for funding, oversight, staffing and program improvement. As a first priority, ESL service needs its own financial and managerial base, and the ESL field needs a base from which to advocate its cause.

2. **To provide adequate and equitable funding.** Because the demand for adult ESL service greatly exceeds the supply in many parts of the country, funding must be judged to be inadequate. And because most of the funds available for ESL are derived

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* This section is developed more fully in Chapter Eight of the companion volume "ESL and the American Dream."

from programs, such as adult education, that distribute their resources on the basis of formulas that are not intended to meet the need for ESL, funding must be deemed to be inequitable. Support for adult ESL must be expanded and targeted to geographic areas where the need and demand for service are most pressing.

3. **To improve the state of professional practice in adult ESL.** This entails, among other things, demanding more systematic planning and closer linkages among programs, creating stronger and more appropriate standards of accountability for results, easing transition among programs and providers, improving the skills and working conditions of staff, and developing better tools of the trade such as materials, assessment procedures and teaching approaches.

4. **To create a professional infrastructure that will give a voice to adult ESL providers and students.** At present everyone involved in ESL is a member of a very silent minority. Unless both professionals and the beneficiaries of ESL service begin to speak up on its behalf, it will remain a neglected backwater of the American educational system. There must be concerted efforts to develop a leadership cadre within the field and organizations that can both advocate its cause and improve its quality.

5. **To improve the working conditions of teachers.** The fact that most ESL teachers are part-time employees without benefits is both a form of economic exploitation and a short-sighted neglect of the human capital that makes programs run. Part-time employment frustrates efforts to upgrade the quality of the teaching staff. It also frustrates efforts to improve programs in other ways, because teachers do not have enough involvement in any particular program to contribute to making it better or master new practices that may be introduced.

THE ESL FIELD

No program for improving adult ESL service can succeed without the active involvement of teachers, administrators and scholars who are associated with this field. They must support and contribute to the federal and state initiatives recommended above. At the programmatic level they must lead the effort to improve all the many details of program design and instructional practice. Most ESL professionals are ill-prepared to play an active role in rebuilding their field. Most have been relegated to a passive role for too long. To help them define and express their views, the ESL field must develop a professional infrastructure that it now lacks. Three steps are of particular importance.

1. **Developing a national professional organization for adult ESL in the United States.** Among the aims of such an organization should be to improve professional knowledge of all aspects of adult ESL service, to sponsor training and technical assistance activities, to develop models for key aspects of service such as teacher certification and program quality, and to advocate the cause of ESL service at the federal, state and local levels. Such an organization must provide a voice for one of the

presently silent constituencies of ESL. Unless the professionals involved with this service system are willing to stand up for it, there is little chance of improvement from government or any other source. Leaders of the present ESL professional organization, TESOL, consider its focus to be on issues of language education that are international in scope, although many of its conference sessions and other activities have value for teachers in the United States. Either TESOL must develop a stronger focus on the particular needs of American ESL teachers and on advocacy, in particular, or a new professional organization must be formed.

2. **Developing a leadership cadre in the adult ESL field.** Few ESL professionals are broadly knowledgeable in the field or have the skills needed for leadership of their peers in accomplishing broad-gauged change. Few have the skills required to advocate the ESL cause to government and other agencies that control its fate. Mobilizing the ESL field and giving it a voice requires the development of a leadership cadre that will have the breadth of knowledge and skills that all but a few ESL professionals lack. There should be a systematic investment in developing this human capital by programs such as leadership forums, fellowships, cross-training and job exchanges. It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of filling this leadership gap. Without effective leadership there is very little chance that the ESL field will be able to plead its own cause, contribute to designing plans for improvement by government or other agencies, or carry out any plans that may be adopted.

3. **Developing a coalition for ESL.** While an effectively organized ESL field can accomplish a great deal, it will need allies in advocating policy and program change by government and local agencies. In the best of circumstances, ESL is too small and obscure to stand alone. It will need the help of others to become a visible national priority. As a result, the ESL field should join with its natural allies — such as advocates of immigrant causes, spokesmen for ethnic groups, as well as other educational and human service organizations — to form a coalition for ESL. To be effective, the coalition should be more than a loose alliance. It should have an institutional embodiment, resources, staff and an action agenda. Among its first priorities must be advocating the changes in federal and state policy recommended above. To promote those changes and other improvements in the field, it should mount a sustained effort to raise the visibility of ESL by a vigorous public information campaign similar to the campaign mounted for literacy in the late 1980s. Such an effort should be aimed at removing the stigma now attached to ESL and many of its beneficiaries. It should also be aimed at raising awareness of the nature and extent of the problems of limited English speakers in the United States and the national stake in solving those problems.

ENDNOTES

1. Based on analysis of the 1% Public Use Microdata Sample provided to the Southport Institute by the Urban Institute.

2. See also Sandra L. McKay, Agendas for Second Language Literacy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1993 and Heide Spruck Wrigley, Green Card English: Curriculum as Politics, unpublished doctoral dissertation (Los Angeles: University of Southern California), 1993.

3. See Gail Weinstein-Shr, "Literacy and Social Process: A Community in Transition," in Cross Cultural Approaches to Literacy, Brian Street, Ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1993. For a discussion of the social networks and coping skills that allow adults who are non-literate to succeed, see Arlene Fingeret, "Social Network: A New Perspective on Independence and Illiterate Adults," Adult Education Quarterly 33 (Spring 1983), 133-146.

4. Communication with Paul Jurmo.

5. See also Terrence Wiley, Access, Participation, and Transition in Adult ESL: Implications for Policy and Practice, (Washington, D.C.: The Southport Institute for Policy Analysis), 1993.

6. See for instance, Federal Register, vol. 56. no. 223: Department of Education Notice of proposed priorities: National English Literacy Demonstration Program for Individuals of Limited English Proficiency.

7. Alister Cumming, "Access to Literacy Education for Language Minority Adults," (Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics), 1992. (ERIC Digest EDO-LE-92-02.)

8. See also Stephen Challis, Methods to Increase the Number of Successful Transfers Between Programs by Students in Adult Literacy Programming: A Research Report, (Manitoba, Canada: Secretary of State, Canada), 1991.

9. In the survey of ESL students at California community colleges in Spicer, et al. (Statewide Survey of ESL Student Populations) documents how learners often have unrealistic goals. The researchers asked students in community college credit and non-credit ESL classes how long it would take for them to learn English. In many cases, the less previous education the student had, the less time they thought it would take.

10. To counteract this trend toward "ESL co-dependency", some programs encourage students to switch teachers after one teaching cycle.

11. This is true even in the cases where the funding source mandates that they accept special needs students, including those who are "limited English proficient".

12. See also Kremer, Nick and Lynn Savage, Employment-Related Literacy Approaches for Limited English Proficient Adults, 1983; and Lopez-Valadez, Jeanne, Immigrant Workers and the American Workplace: The Role of Voc.Ed., (Columbus, OH, ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career and Vocational Education), 1985.

13. The program now asks a counselor from the employment training center to visit ESL programs and to discuss available slots as well as eligibility requirements.

14. See discussion of Valdez v. Randall, in Benesch, pg. 59-60.

15. See Benesch, "ESL on Campus: Questioning Testing and Tracking Practices." in ESL in America: Myths and Possibilities, Ed. Sarah Benesch, 1991, 59-74 for a discussion on the practice of tracking language minority students into ESL classes at U.S. colleges.

16. As a result of the MALDEF suit (Valdez v. Randall), most vocational programs in California no longer require that LEP students take ESL classes before they enter vocational programs.

17. Other programs have found as well that the diversity of vocational goals often makes it impossible to offer a curriculum built around job-specific language skills

18. Such strategies should include dealing effectively with individuals and agencies resistant to or indifferent to transition, and building effective collaborations among providers with varying levels of experience with ESL.

19. Testing requirements vary from state to state: Some states mandate that all ESL and ABE students be tested with the same instrument (California requires the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS), and Florida mandates the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE)). Others, such as Illinois, approve both ABE and ESL tests for adult basic education programs and programs choose the appropriate instrument for their students.

20. See also Sticht, Thomas G, "Measuring Adult Literacy: A response," in Toward Defining Literacy Ed. R.L. Venezky, D.A. Wagner and B.S. Cilberti, 1990, 48-53; Mickulecki, Larry and Paul Lloyd, The Impact of Workplace Literacy Programs: A New Model for Evaluating the Impact of Workplace Literacy Programs (Technical Report TR93-2), 1993; Brindley, Goeffrey, Assessing Achievement in the Learner-Centered Curriculum, 1989.

21. While the TABE and the ABLE purport to test general reading ability, the CASAS measures whether the person taking the test can complete certain competency tasks. The CASAS also includes a listening comprehension component.

22. In fact, as Bob Berdan pointed out in a special analysis for the Southport Institute, the language of the questions that introduce the items is so complex that students might in some instances have greater difficulties understanding the question than completing the literacy task.

23. If a program uses a competency-based curriculum, a competency-test can also help determine which competencies learners have mastered.

24. See also Benesch, ESL in America: Myths and Possibilities and Nick Elson, "The Failure of Tests: Language Tests and Post-Secondary Admissions of ESL Students," in Socio-Political Aspects of ESL, Ed. Barbara Burnaby and Alister Cumming, (Ontario: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education), 1992.

25. When standardized competency assessment systems, such as CASAS, are tied to a competency-based curriculum, they can be said to have curriculum validity as well. For a more extensive discussion of alternative assessment methodologies, see Lenore Balliro, "What Kind of Alternative: Examining Alternative Assessment," TESOL Quarterly 27 (Autumn 1993), 558-561 and also "Reassessing Assessment in Adult ESL/Literacy," ERIC Document ED 339 253, 1989.

26. See also McGrail, et.al., Adventures in Assessment: Learner-Centered Approaches to Assessment and Evaluation in Adult Literacy, 3 vols (Boston: System for Adult Basic Education Support (SABES)), 1991-1992; Fingeret, Hanna Arlene, It Belongs to Me: A Guide to Portfolio Assessment in Adult Education Programs, 1993; Wrigley, Heide Spruck and Gloria J.A. Guth, Bringing Literacy to Life: Issues and Options in Adult ESL, 1992.

27. See Wagner, Daniel A, Myths and Misconceptions in Adult Literacy: A Research and Development Perspective (Policy Brief 93-1), 1993.

28. Bob Berdan, a sociolinguist at California State University Long Beach, in "Testing and Assessment in the ESL Field" an unpublished manuscript, suggests an assessment framework built around an interactive expert systems approach that is jointly developed by programs interacting via computer network. Aspects of this model are adapted here.

29. A similar model is used in Title VII funded family literacy programs which can ask for technical assistance from regional evaluation and assessment centers (see also JoAnn Crandall, Improving the Quality of Adult ESL Programs: Building the Nation's Capacity to Meet the Educational and Occupational Needs of Adults with Limited English Proficiency, (Washington, D.C.: The Southport Institute for Policy Analysis), 1993.

30. Communication with Joan LeMarbre, program specialist with the Massachusetts State Department of Education.

31. Communication from Suzanne Leibman, special consultant for TESOL.

32. In many areas programs would have difficulties finding teachers with certificates or degrees in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL).

33. Heide Spruck Wrigley and Gloria J.A. Guth, Bringing Literacy to Life, (San Mateo, CA: Aguirre International), 1992.

34. See Crandall, JoAnn, "Professionalism and Professionalization of Adult ESL Literacy," TESOL Quarterly, 27 (Autumn 1993), 497-515.

35. Recognizing this fact, the California Teacher Training Institute has initiated a staff development program where experienced teachers can be trained to act as mentors to their less experienced colleagues.

36 As Jerry Brown reminded us, you cannot take intrinsic rewards to the bank.

37. Tibbits, J. et al, The Delivery and Content of Training for Adult Education Teachers and Volunteer Instructors, 1991; also JoAnn Crandall, "Professionalism and Professionalization of Adult ESL Literacy," in TESOL Quarterly 27 (Autumn 1993), 497-515.

38. See also Lytle, Susan L., Alisa Belzer and Rebecca Reumann, Invitations to Inquiry: Rethinking Staff Development in Adult Literacy Education (Technical Report TR92-2), 1992.

39. See also Crandall, Improving the Quality of Adult ESL Programs: Building the Nation's Capacity to Meet the Educational and Occupational Needs of Adults with Limited English Proficiency, 1993.

40. Auerbach, Elsa R., Making Meaning, Making Change: Participatory Curriculum Development for Adult ESL Literacy, 1992; also Crandall, op.cit.; Lytle, et al, op.cit.; Wrigley and Guth, op.cit.

41. For example, practitioners or aides who are themselves language minorities can be given stipends to participate in ESL institutes or to attend university-based programs that offer certificates in teaching English as a Second Language (TESL). A prerequisite for such stipends can be a commitment to teach in a community-based program or becoming a student advocate in a community college program. Such a program would help provide greater access for community teachers while maintaining high standards in teaching adult ESL.

42. See also TESOL guidelines "Standards for Adult Education ESOL Programs."

43. According to Leanne Howard of the San Diego Community College District, instructors who have been teaching are protected by a "grandparent" clause.

44. Taken from the San Diego Community College District Continuing Education Centers-Non Credit ESL Program document "Minimum Qualifications."

45. For a full discussion of the abilities and difficulties of ESL literacy students, see Wrigley and Guth, 1992.

46. Communication with Donna Price Machado winner of the 1993 TESOL Newbury House Award for Excellence in Teaching.

47. Jeanne Lopez Valadez, Immigrant Workers and the American Workplace: The role of Voc.Ed., (Columbus, OH: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career and Vocational Education), 1985.

48. Communication with Donna Price Machado.

49. See also Kremer et al, 1983 and Jeanne Lopez-Valadez,

50. See also Auerbach, Elsa "Reexamining English Only in the ESL Classroom" TESOL Quarterly 27 (Summer 1993), pgs. 9-32.

51. For more information, see also: Sivin-Kachala, Jay and Ellen Bialo, Software for Adult Literacy: Scope, Suitability, Available Sources of Information, and Implications for Federal Policy, 1989. (Paper prepared for the Office of Technology Assessment.); Soifer, R., et al, The Complete Theory-to-Practice Handbook of Adult Literacy: Curriculum Design and Teaching Approaches, 1990; Turner,

Terilyn C., Literacy and Machines: An Overview of the Use of Technology in Adult Literacy Programs (Technical Report TR93-3), 1993; and Packer, Arnold H., Retooling the American Workforce: The Role of Technology in Improving Adult Literacy During the 1990s, 1988.

52. For a full discussion of technology and ESL, see Inaam Mansoor, The Use of Technology in Adult ESL Programs: Current Practice--Future Promise, (Washington, D.C., The Southport Institute for Policy Analysis), 1993.

53. California is designing such a framework as part of its Educard system.

54. For further discussion of the possible uses of technology in an ESL program, see Inaam Mansoor, The Use of Technology in Adult ESL Programs: Current Use--Future Practice, 1993.

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